U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Y2K WORKSHOP, NORTHCENTRAL REGION
SESSION NOTES

STATES REPRESENTED:
Idaho
Minnesota
Montana
Nebraska
North Dakota
South Dakota
Wyoming

TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS: 22
10 Small School Districts
 4 Mid-size School Districts
 1 Large School District
 7 participants were at regional or state education department levels

1st Question: What has your school/ school district done to prepare for the Year 2000 Challenge? With regard to the five phases of preparation for Year 2000, where would you put you school/ school district in as of today?

PHASE 1—AWARENESS
PHASE 2—ASSESSMENT
PHASE 3—RENOVATION
PHASE 4—VALIDATION
PHASE 5—IMPLEMENTATION

Overall finding: Participants are at a variety of phases, generally in phase 2-4. Participants were generally confident that their school districts or state education agency would be ready, however there was general concern about the Y2K readiness of local governments and utilities.

GROUP DISCUSSION:

Timing
Most participants reported that their districts have been working on Y2K for about a year. Some participants reported that they initiated Y2K projects last summer. Another small district and a state representative noted that their Y2K efforts began last spring. Both a mid-size and a large district said they've been working on Y2K for about two years. One state representative, who has been conducting Y2K workshops for the education community throughout his state, reported anecdotally that results from his audience poll indicate that about 30% of the participants from various workshops in his state have not yet begun Y2K work.

Approach
Participants all have differences in their approach to tackling Y2K. Some of those differences are marked, some are slight. Experts agree that a comprehensive inventory of systems and risk assessment is crucial to help formulate a Y2K plan of attack. A participant from a small district noted that due to the difficulty of this task, they had to hire a contractor to do an assessment and compare it to the district's initial inventory. This process helped to identify potential problems that had been missed on the initial inventory. Another small district noted that technical advice and expertise was also outsourced because in-house resources are lacking. Most participants reported that the initial focus of their Y2K work started with their business and administrative systems. One mid-size district reported that they have a non-compliant, custom-made administrative system, and the programmer that built it recently quit. The entire system now needs to be replaced.

A few participants noted that their districts had drawn a distinction between operational and instructional systems. Of those, most said that their operational systems are considered critical and that the instructional systems (i.e. classroom PCs) are not. Two small districts noted that most of their instructional computers were Macintosh and do not need to be renovated or replaced. However, another participant reminded the group that

although Macintosh hardware does not have Y2K problems, some of the software loaded on the machines should be checked. A mid-sized district said that non-mission-critical systems such as classroom PCs represented a sizeable problem and would be fixed this summer.

Participants expressed frustration that some of their newer systems (i.e. systems two years old or less) that they thought were compliant have turned out not to be. A participant from a mid-size district noted that the district's new phone system is compliant, however the voicemail system, which is only two years old, is non-compliant and needs to be replaced. One state participant said that some of their new switches are not compliant. A participant from a mid-sized district noted that although some local service companies were initially unaware of Y2K problems in the equipment they service, they've been willing to take it on and learn more.

One interesting approach came from a participant from a small school district, who said that they started by asking the core question, "What's important?" The top answer was to make sure that seniors scheduled to graduate in June, 2000, are able to apply for college. This means that grade point averages, class standing, transcripts, etc. are all mission-critical information and that was where they started to focus Y2K efforts. In addition, that district is mitigating risk by ending the fall semester early to ensure that all of this information will be correctly processed before January, 2000.

Management and Organization
Several participants noted that the management and organization of their Y2K projects is not limited to IT staff. Some have formed Y2K committees which include school principals, facilities and maintenance staff, and public relations staff in addition to the IT staff. A participant from a mid-size district noted that his district has included representatives from local utility companies on its Y2K committee. Another participant from a mid-sized district said that the school board receives periodic Y2K updates. Some districts have had to seek outside help, and one small district has been using system network students to help do research and test systems. Another small district reported that they had received guidance from the state.

Awareness and Outreach
Participants widely agreed that the awareness phase never really ends and that there is still a pressing need to raise Y2K awareness both within the walls of their school districts and outside them, to the general public. One small district is planning a community forum which will include representatives from local utilities, law enforcement, and local government. One state representative reported that the state had conducted Y2K awareness presentations for school boards. A representative from a different state said that the state is trying to provide training sessions for cities and counties, and that the state is working with other state agencies to convey a consistent message. A participant from a large district reminded the group that it is important to talk to local governments about using schools as emergency shelters. A participant from a mid-size district felt that there should be more information provided to the public and more participation at the community level.

Facilities
Winter is often a particularly harsh time of year in this region, and many participants expressed concern about problems their facilities may face as a result of Y2K. Many of these concerns, however, stemmed from the uncertainty of whether or not local utilities would be able to deliver electricity, gas, or water, and were not related to embedded technology issues such as school elevators or fire alarms. For example, two small districts reported that their buildings were old and did not rely on embedded chips for things such as climate control or elevators. One of these districts even had a one-room schoolhouse heated solely by a wood burning stove. Frozen pipes and sprinkler systems were a concern of many participants. A participant from a small district noted that their fire alarm system was ready, but they did not know whether or not it worked beyond the school (i.e. if the local fire company's system is ready.) A mid-size district reported that each building in the district has a generator, however these generators can only power minimal lighting in buildings and cannot be used to power heaters or other appliances that require a lot of electricity.

Other Concerns
The widespread nature of the Y2K problem has raised many other concerns in addition to those listed above. A participant from a small district said that the district would like to be further along in their Y2K work, but other issues such as e-rate were taking time away from Y2K work. Another participant from a small district noted that they were also checking into 1999 issues, i.e. date issues such as 9/9/99 that may cause disruption before the year 2000. While a participant from a small district stressed that documentation was important, a participant from a large district reported being somewhat nervous about the vendor certifications the district has received so far. A state representative noted that establishing criticality is an important and difficult issue. A representative from another state feels that legal issues are becoming increasingly important. One other representative from a state agency expressed frustration about end users, and that it is extremely difficult to know what noncompliant spreadsheets, databases, etc. end users have developed for themselves and continue to use.

Miscellaneous Comments
- People working on Y2K should not be obsessed by minutia.
- Community planning is a good idea.
- Requisitions should include Y2K certification.
- One small district has designated a Y2K spokesperson to handle all Y2K inquiries and public statements.

2nd Question: What problems has your school/ school district encountered in addressing the Year 2000 issue?

Overall finding: a lack of resources (time, money, staff) and general frustration in dealing with vendors are the problems most cited by this group.

GROUP DISCUSSION

Managing the project
Participants have encountered problems in nearly every aspect of a project that is inherently difficult to coordinate and manage. General awareness is necessary for managing a Y2K project. One state participant has found that people are not taking the Y2K problem seriously. Another state participant felt that people only think of Y2K as a computer problem, and don't realize the effect Y2K could have on the community. A participant from a small district noted that simply identifying critical issues has been a problem for his district. One participant from a mid-size district said that a lot of the potential Y2K problems are out of the realm of the staff's expertise. Several participants noted that people working on Y2K also have other non-Y2K responsibilities, and they don't have enough time to devote to Y2K work. A state participant noted that people are so busy identifying new Y2K problems, that they fail to concentrate on the current Y2K workload. Another state participant noted that identifying end users who have made their own noncompliant spreadsheets and databases has been difficult.

Vendors
Many participants have found that working with vendors has been a slow and frustrating process. Nearly all participants reported that they had experienced some degree of difficulty in obtaining vendor certification of Y2K compliance. Through testing, one small district proved that a vendor compliance certification was inaccurate. Another participant felt that vendors are taking advantage of schools and selling expensive systems. Still another participant from a small district reported that when they consulted the vendor of one of their main systems, the school district staff was actually more knowledgeable about the system than the vendor. Several participants also felt that the vendor certifications they had received were too vague.

Money, Time, and Testing
Money, time, and testing are all interrelated problems reported by participants. Most participants are having difficulty securing funds for Y2K work. Testing can be expensive, and participants have found that the more testing they do, the more they find they need to do. Participants from both states and school districts have found that some systems they thought were compliant turned out to be noncompliant when tested. Testing is also time consuming, and some participants reported that they simply don't have enough time to conduct testing, and will therefore rely on vendor certification of their systems. A participant from a small district noted that they don't have the internal expertise to conduct testing, nor the funds to hire contractors to do it. One state participant noted that the state doesn't have the resources to offer funds to districts for Y2K work.

Miscellaneous
- It can be difficult to find software to run on compliant hardware.
- People are worried about personal blame and liability.
- It is difficult to trust the Y2K "cash cow" industry.
- Isolation is a problem for some small districts.
- Problems with patches have been experienced.
- Some districts don't get rid of old equipment such as those received via donation—they just pass them down into schools and classrooms.
- Non-Y2K system changes, such as changes in programs or regulations, are also occurring and can hinder Y2K remediation work.
- The media is reporting too much negative Y2K hype.
- A participant from a small district reported that they were not able to "roll back" the date on several computers past 1980.

3rd Question: Is your school/ school district testing, or will you test your systems once they are certified compliant?

Overall finding: Most participants either have or plan to do some testing on at least their mission-critical systems.

GROUP DISCUSSION

Necessity
The importance and necessity of testing became clear during this discussion. Several participants agreed with one individual from a mid-size district who said they had been "burned" by a vendor. A participant from a small district stated that he is convinced that testing is necessary. One participant from a mid-size district felt that relying on vendor certification was enough, however a participant from a small district stated that " If you can't test it yourself, certification is worthless." A participant from a mid-size district did not feel that major testing is necessary because most of their systems are new. Another participant, who also did to plan to test, stated that they would simply sue vendors whose certified compliant systems failed. The majority of participants did not share this view. After listening to the discussion, one participant from a large district exclaimed, "We were taking peoples' word for it, but not now!"

Who, when, how
A few participants stated that they either have hired or plan to hire contractors to conduct testing. Participants stated two reasons for this: first, that the district does not have the expertise in-house, and second, that districts desire an "independent", outside look at their systems. One state participant said that most of the people who wrote their programs are still employed by the state agency and would conduct the testing.

Some participants have already begun testing. A state representative reported that they began testing last year. A small district has so far only tested the library system (it failed the test). Another small district has tested the scheduling system. A state participant said they're waiting for this year's legislative session to finish, because they can't take the server down until then. Another state noted that they were unsure when they could take their server down. A large district noted that they had not done any testing yet. A participant from a small district said they would test in the summer.

Those who have begun testing agreed that the testing process is very complicated. Participants are testing in a variety of ways. One participant from a small district stated that testing has become a massive process, and that their district conducts tests on the weekend. One state participant said they've conducted tests on their own small network testing platform. A participant from a small district bought some testing software. Another state participant noted that they will have an online test.

Miscellaneous
- Remember to delete password expirations prior to testing.
- Be careful about e-mail server testing.

- A participant from a small district said that they have color coded all machines, and only those with a green sticker have been fully tested and certified compliant. Any processes involving dates can <u>only</u> be performed on "green machines".
- A participant from a mid-size district reported that because of the high cost of testing, they have had trouble deciding which systems to test and which can do without testing.

4th Question: What contingency work has your school or school district done thus far?

Overall finding: Approximately 50% of the participants reported that their districts/ states have written contingency plans.

GROUP DISCUSSION

Formulating Plans
A third of the participants stated that they have or will use existing contingency/ disaster recovery plans and adapt them for Y2K. These plans commonly address the extreme weather conditions experienced in the northcentral region. One participant from a small district noted that they were not adapting their existing contingency plan to Y2K, however they did draw upon prior contingency planning experience to formulate their Y2K plan. Another participant from a small district felt that despite the contingency planning experience they already have, it has been difficult to manage all of the variables in Y2K contingency planning. One state representative reported that their state has sponsored training workshops on contingency planning.

A few participants reported that to their knowledge, their district or state did not have a Y2K contingency plan. One participant from a small district reported that their city disaster services were not addressing Y2K because the problem is too big. A state participant reported that they had no formal written contingency plan, another state participant reported that they had not done much contingency planning. One participant from a large district reported that a contingency plan supposedly exists, however he had not yet seen it. Another participant from a large district said that they would have a Y2K contingency plan in place before January 1, 2000.

Involving Others
Several participants noted that it is important to make sure that people outside your individual school or school district are involved in the contingency planning process. One mid-sized district has met with the Red Cross to find out how to use school buildings as Red Cross shelters. Another mid-size district contacted outside groups to find out whether or not their schools would be expected to be emergency shelters. A small district has met with both community groups and the state to help with the planning process. Another participant from a small district noted that it is important that even within your school or school district, many people need to be aware of contingency plans, and cross-training should be conducted so that more than one person is familiar with the emergency procedure outlined in the plan. A participant from a mid-size district said they've been working with local disaster preparedness organizations, and that they are comparing possible Y2K failures to those they may experience in an ice storm.

Examples
Participants offered many examples from their own Y2K contingency plans. Several participants from districts and states indicated that they had purchased backup servers. A state participant said that they had moved all applications from servers onto local

machines, and they have also taken printers off the network. A small district, whose payroll is 100% direct deposit, is running January's payroll in December. A state participant reported that they will print emergency checks, and even issue them to direct deposit recipients if necessary. One small district will have all maintenance personnel on duty on January 1, 2000, and another reported that they will use park rangers' radio communications as a backup if needed. A mid-size district reported that they may shut down computers on December 31, 1999, and a state participant reported the same. A participant from a small district said that school will be closed on January 3, and that January 4 will be a teachers in-service day. A state participant also noted that they would encourage other schools to consider starting school at least a day late. Another small district is considering serving cold, brown bag meals that don't require cooking or dishwashing.

Miscellaneous
- Be sure that key individuals are identified in your contingency plans.
- Find out how you fit into a county-wide disaster plan.
- Remember that your school may be used as an emergency shelter.

5th Question: What additional tools or resources would enable your school/ school district to better address the Year 2000 issue?

- **Is there anything the Department of Education could do to aid the elementary/secondary education community in addressing the Year 2000 issue?**
- **Would a Y2K lesson plan be useful to help educate kids about Y2K?**

Overall finding: Participants would like the Department of Education to provide a clearinghouse of Y2K information including product and vendor information, testing information, and contact information for others working on Y2K in schools. Participants would also like us to promote Y2K awareness nationally.

GROUP DISCUSSION

Sample Plans
Several participants noted that they would like to see sample Y2K project plans for schools as well as Y2K contingency plans for schools. A state participant further requested that the Department provide sample plans from all sizes of districts.

Information Sharing
Participants also requested that the Department provide more information via the World Wide Web. Several participants requested a searchable online database, including contact information so they could contact others involved in Y2K in schools. Participants also requested that we provide product and vendor information, also via an online database. A participant from a mid-size district requested that we provide more information on testing and recommended testing procedures. A state participant requested that we provide a summary of the workshop session. A participant from a small district would like us to facilitate continued information-sharing among workshop participants.

Outreach
A few participants felt that the Department could use its resources to continue to raise public awareness about Y2K. A mid-size district requested more public assurances. A participant from a small district would like to see the Department produce another teleconference, and a state participant suggested that another teleconference could be broadcast on a teacher in-service day. A participant from a large district asked that we share Y2K information with other districts in the region. Reaction to the proposed Y2K lesson plan was mixed. A mid-size district requested some guidance for giving teachers the tools to educate the community about Y2K, and one small district expressed a strong interest in a Y2K lesson plan. However, a participant from another small district felt that his district would probably not be interested in a lesson plan.

Miscellaneous
- A few participants would like us to encourage state departments of education to reach out to districts in their states and offer more Y2K guidance.
- Some participants requested that we provide more information on liability issues.
- A state participant requested more information about software licensing issues.